

[Letter to President Roosevelt]

Beliefs & Customs - Folk Stuff

FOLKLORE

NEW YORK 8 Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Emanuel Verschleiser

ADDRESS 1419 Jesup Ave., New York City

DATE December 20, 1938

SUBJECT LETTER TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

1. Date and time of interview
2. Place of interview A story based on talks with Mr. Greifer, of Spring Valley, N. Y.
3. Name and address of informant
4. Name and address of person, if any who put you in touch with informant.
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Emanuel Verschleiser

ADDRESS 1419 Jesup Ave., New York City

DATE December 20, 1938

SUBJECT LETTER TO PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT

You are a writer? You write for the newspapers? Why I ask? Don't laugh at me. In my old age, I, too, became a writer. You are smiling. Go ahead. Yes, I know, you haven't got much time. Please, I will make it short. I came to ask you about this. I wrote a letter to President Roosevelt. I am a plain man, who worked hard all his life... All right, all right. I'm coming to the point. I wanted to ask you, maybe you could put the letter in the newspaper so the [president?] should see it, or maybe you can tell me to whom to send it. Why I wrote in Hebrew? I will tell you. We Jews, when we want to say something important, something that shall say in a few words what is deep and wise, find it in the books of our sages, which are written in the "Holy Language." Our King Solomon said: There's nothing new under the sun. There were always rich and poor and our prophet, Isaiah, cried out against the rich who rob the widows and orphans already in the old times. Now the President cries out against the big bankers, the capitalists, the Rockefellers... This is what I wrote to President Roosevelt. You understand Hebrew? No? You want me to translate it to you? I'll explain to you every word... All right. All right. I'll leave the letter but you won't throw it away. You will put it in the paper? Once I sent the columnist of your paper a piece about Jewish farmers and I watched every day and never saw it 2 printed. Why farmers, you ask? Because that's what I am. A farmer. I am in New York only for the winter, because the cold is not good

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for me. So we take a room in the Bronx, I and my wife. What do two old people need? We have a good neighbor, he looks out for the house and the cow he milks for himself and takes care of her. You know Jewish farmers make a living from renting rooms and taking in boarders, not from farming.

Of course, before, when I was stronger I stayed all year on the farm. I had a horse and buggy and took milk to the people in town. My wife used to make very famous cheeses with "Kimmel" that she learned to make on the other side... You can ask in Spring Valley for Greifer's cheeses. If you need a nice room for the summer come to us. Was I always a farmer? No. I had a little candy store on 10th Street and Ave. C I made a good living. And maybe you think from the "penny-business"? I wouldn't have made enough to pay the rent. I made money by going to auctions and buying up stock and selling to other candy stores. You know every day some candy stores go broke, become bankrupt, so they sell out their stock in auction. So I used to go every day and buy bankrupt stock and then go around and sell it. I can't complain. I made out all right. But it's hard work, you know, in a candy store. No eight hours. You keep the store open till 12 at night. So my health broke down. Sour stomach, gas, headaches... I went to one doctor, to another doctor, but I got sicker and sicker. Then somebody gave me this advise: Go to Dr. Lieber. You surely heard of Dr. Lieber? A wonderful man. Doesn't give you any medicine at all. Nature, he says, is the best doctor. That I am standing here before you, it's thanks to him. I went to Dr. Lieber. He listened to me, examined me, and said to me: Listen to me, Mr. Grier. There's nothing the matter with you. You'll live to a ripe old age. You have the right foundation. I'll make it clear to you. I see that you are a smart man. A house, when it has a good 3 foundation, can withstand all kinds of storms and bad weather. The roof leaks, it blows thru the cracks, one can fix it. I will tell you what to eat. I will give you no medicines. They are good for rich people who don't know how to spend their money. Don't be stingy with water. Drink as much as you can. Eat Black bread and vegetables. And if you can afford, leave New York and live in the country. So I listened to him and I can't complain. I am, thank God, over seventy. So now you know all about me. How you writers like to know

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everything. You like to know what's going on in one's soul. Not that I have anything to hide. So you promise me that you will print the letter? I am taking your word for it. THE LETTER

“To Our Illustrious President:

Our Holy Books say: A poor man is like a dead man. You came and resurrected the poor man from the dead. You came and said: 'Wake up, forgotten man. I will give you new life. I will give you a new deal.' Like the prophet, Nathan, who said to King David: You have so many sheep and yet you want to take the last sheep of the poor man; so you said to the rich, to the Wall St. bankers: Leave the poor man his last sheep. Let him also live. All the rich men hate you for that. They know that you brought new hope to the poor plain man. They know that never again will the old times come back. May I end respectfully that your name, our illustrious President, will live forever.”